

# HOME FIRE SAFETY

For People with  
**MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS**





Provided by  
Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with  
Disabilities: A joint project of Oklahoma  
ABLE Tech & Fire Protection Publications  
at Oklahoma State University

# Why Read This Guide?

Research shows that people with disabilities have a higher risk for being injured or killed in a fire. So, this guide will help you:

- Make sure your smoke alarm is working
- Create and practice a home escape plan
- Reduce fire risks in your home

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# Install Smoke Alarms

You need at least one smoke alarm outside every sleeping area and on every level of your home. The most dangerous fires occur when you are sleeping. The smoke alarm should detect the smoke before it reaches your sleeping area and wake you up.



**Figure 1:** A smoke alarm for people with mobility impairments. This alarm comes with a 10-year battery and is tested and silenced by remote control.

Considering the time it takes you to transfer to your wheelchair, you may need additional smoke alarms to alert you sooner, so you have more time to escape. You need to consider your housing situation and your abilities.

## **Test the Alarm Every Month**

You need to test your smoke alarm every month. Place a reminder on your calendar on a consistent day. Get in the habit of checking your smoke alarm every month. If the alarm is not working, it can't save your life.

To test the alarm, point the remote control at it. Hold down the volume or the channel button for 3 to 5 seconds (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Point the remote toward the alarm.

**Note:** If the smoke alarm comes with a 10-year lithium battery, you do not need to change the battery.

## **Change the Alarm Every 10 Years**

Smoke alarms are good for 10 years. After 10 years, you must buy and install a new smoke alarm. Place a label on the alarm. Write the date the alarm was installed on the label. Make sure the label does not

cover any vents on the smoke alarm.

## **Know Your Smoke Alarm**

Your smoke alarm will make an audible sound to notify you that smoke is present. The sound will be very loud and continuous.

## **Consider a Fire Sprinkler System**

Home fire sprinkler systems give you the best level of safety. The system triggers quickly and puts out the fire before it can spread. Also, the system puts out the fire before anyone in the home can be affected by inhaling toxic smoke, which is the number one cause of deaths in a fire.

For more information, go to [www.homefiresprinkler.org](http://www.homefiresprinkler.org) or call 1-888-635-7222.



# Create a Home Escape Plan

## What is a Home Escape Plan?

A home escape plan is your way out of your home if you have a fire. After you plan your escape, all family members should practice the escape plan every six months. The more you practice your escape plan, the more prepared you will be to take action in an emergency.



**Figure 3:** A family makes a home escape plan.



## How Do I Create a Home Escape Plan?

1. Draw a floor plan of your home on a large sheet of paper or use grid paper.
2. Check to make sure you have included every door and window that you can use as an exit.
3. Draw all outdoor features or possible obstacles that might keep you from escaping through windows and doors.
4. Draw arrows in red to show the best way out of each room.
5. Draw arrows in blue to show the second way out of each room.
6. Choose a meeting place in front of your home and mark it on the escape plan.

7. Practice the escape plan using the best way out of your sleeping area.

8. Practice the second way out of your sleeping area.

**Note:** Know both ways out, so you can escape. Make sure that everyone in your family can follow both ways out.

9. Arrange to call 911 or your local emergency number from a neighbor's house.

10. Update the plan as needed.

## What Other Things Should I Do?

1. **Sleep on the ground floor.**  
Sleep in the location in your home that provides the fastest escape route. A room with a door to the outside would be best.
2. **Include your children in your escape plan.** Make sure you and your children know how to get out.
3. **Clear all escape routes.** Remove all items from halls, any doors and windows, and sleeping areas.
4. **Make sure that your house number is clearly visible from the street.** Consider painting your house number on the street curb. If you live in an apartment, your landlord should ensure the apartment number is visible from the parking lot and that all building numbers are visible from a distance.

5. **Practice the escape plan every six months.** Include your children. Make certain all family members know how to get out.
6. **GET OUT AND STAY OUT.** Never go back in your home for any reason—not for pets, medication, or anything.

## Practice Your Escape Plan

You and your family must practice your escape plan before the emergency. Once the alarm sounds, you only have a few minutes to escape, so you must be prepared. The more you plan and practice, the more prepared you will be in an emergency.

### Find Two Exits from Each Room

Know all doors and windows that lead to the outside. Make sure all family members, even children, can open them easily. If you

have any security bars on the windows, make sure they have an emergency release and everyone can open the bars quickly.

If you have a multi-level home, consider sleeping on the ground level. Get an escape ladder for bedrooms on the second floor. Make sure that the ladder fits the window.

## **Choose a Meeting Place Outside**

Choose a meeting place in front of your home.

## **Practice Your Escape Plan**

Practice your escape plan regularly. For sleeping areas on the second floor, practice setting up the ladder. But do not climb down the ladder. Climb down the ladder only in emergency situations.

If you have a service animal, practice your escape plan with your animal. Train your animal how to respond to the alarm when you test it every month. However, because you test it every month, your animal may become accustomed to the sound. So, it is important for the animal to realize that the alarm means danger and the animal should alert you.

You should also practice your escape plan without your service animal. If the animal is trapped inside your home, tell the firefighters when they arrive.

## **In a Fire**

Escape must be immediate. Do not wait to be rescued. If there are closed doors between you and the exit to the outside (such as a closed bedroom door), you should feel the door or the doorknob with the back of your hand for heat (see Figure 4). If it is hot, do

not open it. Use your second way out.



**Figure 4:** Feel the door with the back of your hand.

If the door does not feel hot, open it with caution. There still may be smoke and heat on the other side. If you open the door and find smoke or heat, close the door, and use your second way out. If the path to the outside is clear of smoke, or if you can crawl under the smoke, move quickly to the exit (see Figure 5).





**Figure 5:** Practice crawling to get under smoke.

If you are not mobile or are trapped, call 911 or your local emergency number, and tell them where you are in your home.

## **Modify Your Plans**

You are the expert on your own abilities and needs. You must plan how to give instructions to emergency responders when

they come. Instructions should be quick and to the point. You will only have time to relay the most important information.

Call the fire department using a non-emergency number before an emergency. They may be able to store information about your needs. For example, you can tell them that your house has one person who uses a wheelchair in the back bedroom on the first floor.

Remember that you will contact 911 or your local emergency number from a neighbor's house. Practice communicating with your neighbors about an emergency. Include this step when you practice your escape plan.

# Reduce Fire Risks

## Prepare to Cook

- Cook when you are alert. Do not cook if you are drowsy or if you feel the effects of alcohol, medication, or other drugs.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothes when you cook.
- Roll your sleeves over your elbows when you cook.
- Keep all items that can burn away from the stove.
- Do not hang a towel on the oven handle.

## While You Cook

- Never leave a stove unattended while cooking. Turn off the stove if you must step away, even for a moment.
- Keep children and pets away. Create a three-foot safe-zone around the stove.
- Always use a pan with a lid that fits properly.
- Keep a lid nearby to smother any flames.

- Keep handles of the pans turned in.
- Use a timer to remind you when your food is ready. As soon as the timer goes off, turn off the stove.
- Do not move hot water from the stove to the sink. Use ladles or scoops to remove food from boiling pots.
- When you take hot items from the stove or oven, use a cart to transport these items. Never place hot pans in your lap.
- Keep the area around your stove clean.
- Do not allow grease to build up around the stove. Built-up grease can catch on fire.

## **If There is a Fire**

- If a pan of food catches on fire, keep the lid between you and the fire, as if it were a shield. Slide the lid on top of the pan. Turn off the burner, and then slide the pan to a cooler surface.
- **Danger!** Never use water to put out a grease fire.

## Microwave

- Microwaves are intended only for food preparation.
- Never put any metal, tin foil, twist-ties, or silverware in a microwave.
- Only use microwave-safe containers. Microwaves can melt some plastic containers or cause some ceramic and glass containers to break.
- Microwaves heat unevenly, and your food will continue to cook even after the microwave stops. Open all containers carefully to avoid steam burns.
- Make sure that the door to the microwave always seals properly. Do not use the microwave if the door does not close.
- Consider placing your microwave near a table, so you can move the items quickly from the microwave to the table.
- If you have a fire in the microwave, do not open the door. Turn the microwave

off. Call 911 or your local emergency number. Before you use the microwave again, have it serviced to make sure it works properly.

## Smoking

- Smoking and smoking materials are the number one cause of fatal home fires. If you smoke, you and your family are at greater risk for fire, burns, and death.
  - Never smoke in bed. If a cigarette fire starts in your bed, you are too close to the fire and may not be able to escape.
  - Never leave a lit cigarette. Put it out.
  - Do not smoke when drinking alcohol or taking prescription medication that makes you drowsy.
  - Do not smoke in carpeted areas.
  - Do not smoke in upholstered chairs.
- Smoke at a table. Do not use a tablecloth.

Keep flammable items (such as napkins) away.

- Keep the smoking area free of clutter.
- Keep lighters and matches where children cannot get them.
- Always use ashtrays that are deep and will not tip over.
- Only use ashtrays to dispose of cigarettes. Do not put trash in them.
- Do not overfill ashtrays.
- Before you dump cigarette butts in a trash can, pour water on the butts.
- Never smoke in areas where oxygen is being used.

## Candles

- Always trim the wicks to 1/4 of an inch before you light them. Long wicks create more smoke, create higher flames, and cause candles to burn unevenly.
- Always put candles on a holder that



will not burn. Move them away from things that can burn (curtains, furniture).

- Put candles in sturdy holders that are big enough to collect wax and will not tip over.
- Keep candles at least 4 inches apart. If they are too close together, they may melt each other's wax or burn improperly.
- Make sure that children or pets cannot reach candles or knock them over.
- No burning candle is safe. Never leave candles unattended. Even jar candles are unsafe because the jar can break and the wick can ignite other materials.
- Blow out candles when you leave a room.
- Do not use candles in your bedroom. You may fall asleep and forget about them. About half of all home fires that involve candles start in the bedroom.
- If the electricity goes out, always use a flashlight, not a candle.

## Electrical Appliances

- Immediately unplug any appliances that spark, smell unusual, or overheat. Replace them or have them repaired.
- Be careful of cords. Do not run over electrical cords with your wheelchair or scooter. You can damage these cords.
- When an electrical cord frays or cracks, replace it.
- Do not put electrical cords or wires under rugs.
- Make sure that lamps and night lights do not touch any fabrics or furniture.
- If you use an extension cord, unroll it all the way to keep it from retaining heat.
- If you have young children in your home, cover the unused outlets with plastic covers.
- Do not overload outlets.
- Make sure that you place plugs in the proper type of outlet.
- Polarized plugs (one prong is wider

- than the other) require polarized outlets.
- Three-prong plugs require outlets with three holes to properly ground the plug.
  - Never force a plug into an outlet when it will not fit.
  - Make sure the area where you charge your battery is well-ventilated and clear of debris.
  - If a fuse blows or a circuit breaker trips, do not just replace or reset it. Find out what is overloading the system, and correct the problem. If the overload is not readily apparent, have a licensed electrician check out the circuit.

## Fireplaces

- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from heat sources.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothes near open flames.
- Use old, dry wood in your fireplace. New or wet wood is more dangerous.

- Use a fire screen.
- Every year, at the beginning of winter, inspect your chimney for cracks or obstructions.
- Once a year, have a professional clean your fireplace.

## Space Heaters

- Space heaters are a fire risk.
- Use only space heaters with a UL label.
- Make sure that your space heater has an automatic switch to turn it off if it falls over.
- Give your space heater 3 feet of space in all directions.
- Keep furniture, bedding, and clothes 3 feet away from space heaters.
- Use the space heater for short periods of time.
- Do not go to bed with the space heater on.
- Always unplug your space heater when not in use.

# Remember!

1. You are the expert on your abilities and needs. If you know what to do in a fire, you can lower your risk.
2. Install a smoke alarm in your home. Test it every month. Change it every 10 years.
3. Practice your escape plan every six months. Make changes as needed. Put it where you can see it.
4. Be safe around the house. Reduce home fire risks.

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## **For More Information**

Oklahoma ABLE Tech 1-888-885-5588 (V/TDD) or  
405-744-9748 <http://okabletech.okstate.edu>

Fire Protection Publications 1-800-654-4055  
<http://www.ifsta.org>



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